

MR. HARRIS: My name is Tom Harris. I'm the president and CEO of Alaska Village Initiatives. It is a statewide organization community development corporation for representing rural Alaska. Our members include the ANCSA Corporation, Alaska Native Claim Settlement Act Corporations and tribes. This is our second opportunity to participate here, and we are extremely grateful for that opportunity. It has opened up so many doors for us, and I wanted to take this opportunity to thank AIC, Ross, and also the Indian Nation Conservation Alliance for allowing us to participate. Our members are stunned, quite frankly, at what has been available and what we didn't know about. We are wanting to learn more. We bring to the table some 44 million acres of land, and these lands are critically located throughout Alaska. We feel like we're running 80 or more years behind in trying to understand and participate. We are also thankful for the groundwork that has already been laid by the tribes here in the Lower 48, and it is a path that we will learn much from.

We recognize that Alaska as it's running behind. We also recognize that -- and for forgive me if I offend anyone. This is not intended to offend. This is intended to educate. In 1962, '63 era, slavery ended in Alaska. I said 1962. And the tribes, the Aleut tribes, on St. Paul Island were released finally. Prior to that time, they were not allowed to leave the island. They were not allowed to leave except for a criminal offense or medical reasons. Their owners were the United States government. This is historical fact. There are many methods of slavery. While we have the land, we are bound to it and not able to leave it without incurring substantial economic distress. That distress today is represented in dramatically depleted wildlife resources.

And if not for things such as food stamps, these communities would be in a world of hurt more than they are today. So when we hear that the food stamp program is going to be cut some \$700 million, then what are we going to do to help these communities survive? Survival is a very significant event for a number of villages. We are dealing today with villages where the last member of the village is moving out. And when I say "move out," that means lights off, everything is left in the village, all value, all lifetimes of wealth building wiped out. We are also facing situations where organizations are coming in and buying conservation easements on the property. Today you will hear a little bit about that where the federal government has provided the land and then several decades later come back and said, "Well, for 60 bucks we'll take an acre of your land for conservation easement."

We are very challenged by being forced into a debate with the national decision makers concerning preservation conservation. We have a saying, some of us up there saying, "The preservationists have won. The forest is dead." And we are being preserved into extinction by that concept. I don't know how our transcriber is going to put this in, but just so that you hear it. (Noise) It's a lesser goose. And when we think there is no contact between us, that we are at the other end of the country, that goose is flying over and saying, "Hi neighbor." He's born in our country. Mates in yours. So we know that we have a relationship there that has to be preserved. That relationship while it deals with food, it deals also with the things such as avian flu. We've already been warned that that's coming, and without USDA's help, I don't know how we are going to deal with that. We look at this issue for Alaska as a national interest issue. We are the 49th state. We are the Last Frontier. We are struggling not to become the Lost Frontier, lost in terms of the wildlife resource,

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lost in terms of the communities that rely upon them. But you also need to be aware that these communities are, and I am restating this for the public record, that communities such as Tionec are there in support of a project that means shipping coal overseas, and that coal obviously will bring economic benefit to the community. But because of the work that they have done and the programs they have seen on USDA supported programs in the Lower 48, they are now welcoming that program as a partner, not an opponent. That's 20 million tons of coal that may be shipped to the Orient in the near future.

What we also need to be aware of is in 1993 the airport was studied by the State of Alaska, and the study reaffirmed what the Japanese already knew because the Japanese government also studied the ports in North America. It documented that this port was the most cost effective bulk commodities port in the North Pacific Rim. And this port has the opportunity to provide hundreds of thousands of tons and millions of dollars of opportunity for Alaska and the United States. It's cost advantage is not less than 50 percent over every other port study. And as the tonnage increases, the value and the advantage increases. What has been holding it up is the wildlife protection. There's only 28 miles of road necessary to connect this port with all of the resources that Alaska has to offer. Twenty-eight miles of road to connect it to use the Usibelli coal mine, the other gold mines, the Wishbone coal. This is also the community that will be providing power for Pebble Mine, \$16 billion as of last October, 2000 jobs. Those mines, including the Diamond Creek mine are all surrounded by villages that rely heavily on subsistence. We have had 34 years to look at this economic development issue as a board, and we keep coming back to this one issue. We applaud USDA and the work that it has been done up there.

The USDA World Development has been building and putting in community facilities. There is a great investment there. But that investment is like building a house. Has no economic foundation. Each new water plant that comes in represents an increase in the cost of the community. We have been seeing averaging 0 percent increase in energy costs for that community when that new water plant comes in, and it's great to have that water. It's wonderful. But villages are turning back the keys and saying, "I'm sorry. We can't afford it." At the same time outside hunters and guides are coming in and taking economic resource out of the community with no benefit to the community. I acknowledge that there is not enough outreach going on to the tribes here, and I also acknowledge there is almost zero going on up there because there is not a single tribal liaison in the entire state serving 220 recognized tribes, not a single one, not even part time at this point. Today I'm bringing to you messages I received yesterday that with the USDA and NRCS office across the streets, literally across the street, from the village corporations and regional corporations, at this moment in time, no one is across the street to let them know of the programs. We want to be partners in this process. We want to contribute and these communities are extremely fragile. It takes very little to positively to impact them, very little to negatively impacted them. And I encourage the agency to help us with this process.

The fight on ANWR is not about oil. The fight on ANWR is not about oil. It's about the wildlife resource. The Trans Alaska Gas Pipeline that is going to come down and provide power to the communities down here is not about gas. The fight will be about wildlife. As I wrap up, we as a nation have made a commitment, and it's a very wonderful commitment. No child left behind. Can we keep that commitment if we leave that child's family behind, if we leave that child's village

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behind, if we leave that child's tribe behind, if we leave that child's state behind? That's where we are. Alaska is 80 years behind. We want to contribute to the process. As part of our contribution,

Alaska brings Alaska's gold, its timber, its seafood, its oil, its gas, its coal. And, yes, we have some of all of those.

But today Alaska holds the nation's large supply of gold, largest supply of oil and gas, the largest coal reserves, some believe on the planet, the largest forests, the largest salmon runs, the largest copper, lead, zinc, and when it becomes exportable, fresh water. With 34,000 miles of coastline we have a tremendous resource in aquaculture as well. We weren't there at the 2002 Farm Bill. We hope Alaska is represented in 2007. We hope that these comments will help put a place there.

While Alaska natives represent a very small portion of the population, you need to know that of the top of 49 domestic companies in the state, we represent over 50 percent of the revenue and 50 percent of the jobs created. We also recognize that our state has a problem with the word "tribe."

As early as 2003 our governor was proposing that EPA no nothing have anything to do with tribes in Alaska, that all communication with tribes go through the governor's office. Obviously, we opposed that. You need to know that tribal conservation districts were opposed by the leadership in Alaska.

Thanks to a lot of effort by a lot of good people, that effort was overturned. So as we wrap up, I want to thank you again IAC. I want to thank you INCA. I especially want to thank USDA. You are doing a wonderful job. Please bring that wonderful work to Alaska.